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ABSTRACT

Despite similarities between Hindi and Urdu and mutual intelligibility, at least on the spoken level, slight grammatical differences between the two languages do exist. The treatment of gender provides an example of such differences. Explanation of the actual differences in gender usage can be based on a synchronic, linguistic level as well as on a diachronic, cultural level. First-year students learning these languages, unless well-versed in linguistics or literature, probably do not need to receive such explanations for learning purposes. Such linguistic and cultural complexities are more easily understood by second-year students who have been exposed to other exceptions in Hindi and Urdu grammar and to Indian culture in general. (VM)

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Some Cultural and Grammatical Aspects of Gender in Hindi and Urdu

For most American students who, by accident of birth live in an overwhelmingly monolingual environment, the notion of grammatical gender is often confounding and perplexing. Gender is, they reason, a matter of sex: what is sexually male is "masculine"; what is sexually female is "feminine." Hence, when they come upon feminine nauta, "sailor" in Latin, or neuter Mädchen, "girl" in German, they tend to back away in a mild daze, slightly confused.

While we are a bit beyond the explanations of gender given by language teachers of a generation ago ("What is large and tough is masculine; what is small and delicate is feminine"), the student is not greatly helped in his understanding of grammatical gender with the statement "That's the way it is." In any event, the student must memorize the gender of every noun. If in this process he is made to understand that sexual and grammatical gender, while sometimes coterminous, are not synonymous, the student will have accomplished no mean task.

Gender is a grammatical feature of Hindi and Urdu, the language, or languages, spoken on the Indian subcontinent by some 240 million people, thus making it/them the third most widely spoken language/languages in the world after Chinese and English.[1] These languages

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I wish to express my sincere thanks to Professor Vasant Khokle of Michigan State University for his valuable comments on an earlier draft of this paper.

as we shall call them, the subject of a great deal of political and religious controversy in India and Pakistan, are mutually intelligible on the spoken, vernacular levels.[2] In their written forms, particularly in their literary aspect, the two languages diverge widely. Hindi, written in the Devanagari script, looks to Sanskrit for its intellectual and literary vocabulary, as well as its literary images and modes of expression. Urdu, on the other hand, is written in a modified Persio-Arabic script, usually called Nastaliq, and goes to Persian and Arabic for its intellectual vocabulary and literary images. Slight grammatical differences also exist between these two languages, differences which are quite minimal, in fact, given the large numbers of speakers of each language and the relatively underdeveloped mass media in these two countries. One such grammatical difference between Hindi and Urdu appears in each language's treatment of gender. This difference, while slight, can be looked at from both a synchronic as well as a diachronic point of view in explaining it to students. It is to the context of one problem of grammatical gender in these two languages which we shall address ourselves in this paper.

In standard Hindi and Urdu, our concern in this paper, there are gender markers in the verb. There must be an agreement between the subject of the sentence and the verb in certain direct constructions. For example, if one were to say: "We go to the market," one would have to know the gender of "we" in order to utter the sentence. If "we" is masculine, the sentence would be:

ham baazaar jaatee haiN[3]

The glosses for this utterance are: ham = we; baazaar = market, jaa- = root of the verb "to go"; -t- = mark of the present participle; -ee = masculine plural marker; haiN = are, consisting of hai plus nasalization (a plural marker in the verb "to be" and in other verb constructions). As with nearly all Hindi sentences, this utterance follows a subject-object-verb pattern.

If "we" is feminine, the sentence would be:

ham baazaar jaatii haiN

with the difference that instead of jaatee we have jaatii, the feminine marker in the present participle. Thus,

ham baazaar jaatee haiN
ham baazaar jaatii haiN

A Hindi speaker would translate these utterances as "We [masculine] go to the market" and "We [feminine] go to the market," respectively. An Urdu speaker, however, would react differently. He would translate ham baazaar jaatee haiN as "We [masculine or feminine] go to the bazaar." The utterance containing the feminine form, ham baazaar jaatii haiN, would be considered incorrect or, worse, "inelegant" Urdu, or not Urdu at all, but rather Hindi.

Let us consider another example. The statement "We understand" or "We do not understand" can be rendered idiomatically into Hindi in either the masculine or feminine forms, depending on the sexual gender of the speaker. In addition, the statement is rendered in the past tense in Hindi, as opposed to the present of English:

samajh gaee	and	nahiiN samjhee
We (masculine) understood.		We (masculine) did not understand.

The glosses for these utterances are: ham = we, but understood and not stated; samajh = root of the verb samajhnaa, "to understand"; gaee = the inflected form of jaanaa, "to go," used here as part of a compound verb construction indicating, among other things, emphasis on the action of the main vero samajhnaa and a carrier of tense and gender; ga- = the past participial stem of jaanaa; -ee = the masculine plural marker; nahiiN = negative particle. (It should be noted that a vowel deletion occurs in the negative form samjhee, as opposed to samajh in the positive utterance; because of the negative particle one cannot use a compound verb construction as in the affirmative; this is a minor point of grammar and does not in any way change the point we wish to establish here.)

In addition, the statements can also be made by women, requiring feminine grammatical gender, thus changing the forms above to:

samajh gaiiN	and	nahiiN samjhiiN
We (feminine) understood.		We (feminine) did not understand.

with -ii- in gaiiN and samjhiiN as feminine markers and -N, nasalization, as a plural marker. Thus,

samajh gaee	and	nahiiN samjhee
samajh gaiiN	and	nahiiN samjhiiN

These forms, however, apply only to Hindi and not to Urdu. The Urdu speaker would admit the masculine forms for both men and women

speakers; the feminine forms would carry with them the same negative connotations as did jaatii in our earlier discussion.

At this point it is important to note that these differences in masculine and feminine forms occur only in the first person plural forms of the verbs. Both Hindi and Urdu have identical masculine and feminine forms of the verb in the remainder of the paradigm. For example:

I go.	maiN jaataa huuN (masculine)
	maiN jaatii huuN (feminine)
You (informal) go.	tum jaatee ho (masculine)
	tum jaatii ho (feminine)
He/it goes.	vah jaataa hai (masculine)
She/it goes.	vah jaatii hai (feminine)
You (formal) go.	aap jaatee haiN (masculine)
	aap jaatii haiN (feminine)
They go.	ve jaatee haiN (masculine)
	ve jaatii haiN (feminine)

Similarly, the past tense of verbs involving direct constructions shows the same masculine-feminine distinctions in both Hindi and Urdu. We have already noted that only in the first person plural forms would Urdu disallow a feminine utterance such as samajh gaiiN.

The logical question arising from this discussion is a simple "why?" Why does Hindi recognize sexual gender as a determining factor in the first person plural, while Urdu does not? Why does Urdu insist on only masculine plural markers in the first person plural,

even though a woman is referring to herself and other members of her sex? Why should Urdu speakers consider the use of the feminine gender in this context as substandard or inelegant Urdu, or Hindi? Is this a phenomenon and idiosyncrasy of Urdu or is there an explanation for it? Two explanations can be given, both of which throw light upon the linguistic process involved here. The first is a synchronic, linguistic explanation of the problem; the second, a diachronic, cultural definition.

Linguistically speaking, the difference between the first person plural of Hindi and Urdu can be looked at in terms of linguistic universals. First, if there are two genders in natural language, these will be masculine and feminine; of these two, masculine is the more neutral. This is demonstrated by the fact that in languages with gender, the masculine is generally used in speaking of addresses of mixed gender. The all-inclusiveness of the pronoun "we" allows such usage. In the context of Hindi and Urdu, we must also note that speakers--both men and women--will also use <u>ham jatee haiN</u>, the first person plural form, when referring to themselves in the singular. An explanation often given for this usage is more philosophical than linguistic: the individual person speaking wishes to obliterate himself into the larger underlying cosmic force of the universe (the <u>aatman-brahman</u> distinction of Indian philosophy). While this explanation might have some philosophical substance to it, this phenomenon is best discussed and understood linguistically as a problem of neutralization. In this particular instance, Urdu has

neutralized gender distinctions in the first person plural, whereas Hindi has not. In the case of the singular first person addresser referring to himself or herself in the first person masculine plural, we have further evidence of neutralization in both languages.

Because Hindi does not neutralize as extensively as Urdu in this particular context does not mean that Hindi is free of neutralization. For example, consider the so-called necessitative, or obligatory aspect in both Hindi and Urdu. These are characterized in English by the use of "must" or "have to." For example, the expression mujhee jaanaa hai. This would be rendered as "Going is necessary for me" or, in less crabbed English, "I have to go." The glosses for this statement are: mujhee = the oblique, or indirect, form of maiN, "I" plus the postposition ko, which combine into the portmanteau form of mujhee; jaanaa = the infinitive form of "to go"; hai = "is." Jaanaa here retains its form with a masculine -aa ending.

Consider the utterance mujhee saarii xariidnaa hai. Glosses here are: saarii = sari, with its gender marker -ii, indicating that it is a feminine noun; xariidnaa = the infinitive form of "to buy," with -naa the infinitive marker with a masculine singular ending. While the utterance is grammatical in Hindi, translating roughly as "I have to buy saris," it is not grammatical in Urdu, which requires the application of an additional gender agreement rule. In Urdu the infinitive xariidnaa must agree in gender with saarii, thus giving mujhee saarii xariidnii hai.

With saaṛii in the plural, saaṛiiaN, -aaN the plural marker of marked feminine nouns (i.e., ones ending in -ii), Hindi does not again require any gender or number agreement:

mujhee saaṛiiaN xariidnaa hai

This translates as "Buying saris is necessary for me," or "I must buy saris."

Urdu, on the other hand, applies an additional gender agreement rule as well as a number agreement rule to generate:

mujhee saaṛiiaN xariidnii haiN

which translates also as "Buying saris is necessary for me," or "I must buy saris." One notes here that an agreement rule between the direct noun, saaṛiiaN, and the infinitive, xariidnii, is operative; in addition, there is number agreement between saaṛiiaN and the copula, haiN. Thus, the contrasts in the two languages are as follows. In the singular:

mujhee saaṛii xariidnaa hai (Hindi)
mujhee saaṛii xariidnii hai (Urdu)

And in the plural:

mujhee saaṛiiaN xariidnaa hai (Hindi)
mujhee saaṛiiaN xariidnii haiN (Urdu)

Here we see that it is Hindi which neutralizes the masculine-feminine gender distinction, as well as the singular-plural distinction. Urdu, on the other hand, requires additional rules to generate its forms, which retain these distinctions of number and gender.

When teaching students these two points, the teacher can speak of what is the predominantly Urdu pattern and what is the predominantly Hindi pattern. Linguistic evidence in the dialects of both languages seems to suggest that both languages are moving in a direction toward neutralization of gender distinctions, though not necessarily in exactly the same constructions.[4] However, since one is striving to teach what is basically a standard language, it is necessary to speak in terms of these irregular synchronic patterns as they exist in the standard language. Theoretically, however, there will be a time in which these irregularities will pass out of the languages and will be treated as irregular diachronic phenomena.

And in mentioning diachronic phenomena, let us look at the second manner in which these irregularities can be explained. This is what we shall term a cultural explanation, and it requires that we go back into the history of these two languages. The term "Hindi" as it is used today refers to that language based on a dialect known as Braj Bhasha spoken in the middle and upper Doab, that area between the Ganges and Jumna rivers (do = two; aab = river) in Northern India.[5] While there are a number of dialects in this general area, among them Bundeli, Kanauji and Bangaru, it is the Braj Bhasha dialect as spoken in the general vicinity of the city of Mathura, a great center of Krishna worship, that serves as the main, though not exclusive, basis for the standard form of this language.

Urdu, on the other hand, developed in India, particularly in the southern, or Deccan, area of the country as a result of the coming

of the Muslim invaders from outside India. When the forces of these armies came into contact with the indigenous peoples whom they conquered, a lingua franca sprang up and eventually became known as Urdu. This language possessed a substructure based on the Khari boli dialect of Western Hindi, with a linguistic superstructure borrowed from the languages of the various invaders, including Turkish, Persian and Arabic. In fact, the word <u>urdū</u> itself is Turkish for "camp" and is related to our English word "horde," for it was in the invaders' camps that this lingua franca came into being. Large blocks of vocabulary were borrowed, as were a number of phonological items, including the so-called "Persio-Arabic" sounds: f, x, z, ɣ and q, which did not exist in the indigenous dialects prior to the coming of the Muslim invaders. Very quickly, however, Urdu outgrew its utilitarian usage as a lingua franca and gained currency both as a court language and literary language, first in the courts of the southern Muslim kings, then later in the north among the various rulers, including the Moghul emperor and the court at Lucknow. By the middle of the seventeenth century, Urdu was firmly established as a literary language of considerable prestige; by the nineteenth century it eventually replaced Persian as the court language of the Moghul kings and was given patronage by the British rulers. Hence, Urdu came to hold a place of great prestige among the vernacular languages of India, both literarily and as a lingua franca, but now as a lingua franca such as French was in Europe during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in Europe. In fact, one commentator even

refers to Urdu as the French of India.[6] It is then in the context of this prestige that Urdu speakers would equate certain grammatical structures as substandard or as Hindi. However, the point of prestige is only a partial answer to the larger question at hand. The remainder of the answer lies in the cultural heritage of the Muslim invaders who gave Urdu its birth and prestige. Urdu is the product of a mixed Indian and Muslim culture. As the language of conquerors who eventually settled permanently in the country, Urdu was emulated by the upper echelons of the indigenous population, which was in the main Hindu. It is on the basis of this fact that currency has been given to the inaccurate and fanciful notion that Hindi is the language of Hindus and Urdu the language of Muslims. It should be pointed out that there are Hindus who have written and continue to write in Urdu, and there are Muslims who have written and continue to write in Hindi. It should also be understood that in the past the terms "Hindi" and "Urdu" have been used interchangeably, even synonymously, by both Hindus and Muslims and are, as such, rather vague and imprecise in their meaning.[7]

But there is still another aspect of these two cultures which explains the use of the masculine gender by both men and women in the first person plural. Muslim culture was and still is basically homo-social. That is, the sexes are segregated in this society, the men with men, the women with women. In the higher levels of Muslim society women were confined to separate quarters, even within the same family. When these women left their homes they were required

to wear a burqā, a head-to-foot veil, a Muslim invention which resulted from an overzealous reading of Muhammad's injunction in the Koran which required women to be covered from the neck down. Social and cultural gatherings also exhibited segregation. Men could attend freely; women of quality, if they were allowed at all, were required to sit in rooms screened off in such a way as to allow the women to look out but to prevent the men from looking in. Because this custom was practiced by the rulers, Hindus of upper-class families also adopted pardah (literally, "curtain" or "veil"). While this custom is not as prevalent as it used to be, it still exists in various areas in India. Until recently, classrooms in universities with large numbers of Muslim students were specially partitioned to allow the women to sit apart from the men. The important point, however, is that it was the speech of men--more specifically, the speech of men among men--and not the speech of men and women that became the standard for Urdu.

Another phenomenon which reenforced this situation also existed in Urdu literature. Early Urdu literature was in many respects a carbon copy of Persian, in both form and content. One distinction, however, is that Persian has no grammatical gender, whereas Urdu does. Hence, when Urdu had to make allowances for gender in poetry, it opted to incorporate masculine grammatical gender to the exclusion of feminine grammatical gender in the literary language. This, of course, could be looked upon as part of this larger phenomenon of neutralization within the language. As a result, however, Urdu poetry may strike the uninitiated Western reader at first glance as thoroughly homosexual, for both lover and beloved are referred to as masculine.

This is not the case, however. Just as good Persian poetry, particularly the ghazal, a very intricate genre of lyric poetry, was required to be read on two levels--a mystical and a mundane--so too did Urdu poetry. Hence, the Urdu ghazal can be read on a purely physical, sexual level and also on a mystical, spiritual level on which God is portrayed as the lover and the poet as the beloved (or vice versa). Both lover and beloved, however, are referred to in the masculine gender, more by poetic convention than by sexual preference. Analogues to such a phenomenon can be found in Western poetry rather easily, and the distinctions of eros and agape are just as operative here as they are in Urdu.

Conclusion

The explanations of the grammatical phenomenon involving gender in Hindi and Urdu set forth herein are valid for a scholarly meeting such as we have here with ACTUAL. However, the question of giving these explications to first-year language students of Hindi and Urdu (these structures are introduced during the first semester of the first year of study) is debatable. If a teacher has students who have a firm grasp of linguistics, he can very effectively give the linguistic discussion of this problem with the certainty that what has been said will be understood. If one has students with a basis in literary studies, the cultural explanation of the phenomenon can be easily understood. If one is very lucky, he might have a student or students conversant in both fields and can offer both explanations.

However, in teaching first-year language students--all undergraduates--at Oakland University, I have not presented either of these explanations when discussing the grammatical structures involved. I have found them, by and large, incapable of grasping the implications of what is being said. They invariably end up being very confused. My approach has been to demand that they learn the patterns simply because "That's the way it is." I have found that discussion of these linguistic and cultural complexities are best understood when students have had some exposure to other "exceptions" to Hindi and Urdu grammar and to Indian culture in general, usually by their second year of language study. Students with such exposure tend to feel more at ease with the notion that all questions, both grammatical and cultural, need not have a Right Answer but can, instead, have several or even many answers.

Footnotes

[1]Figures regarding the number of speakers of these languages vary widely. As of June 1968 the number of speakers of Hindi was set at 181 million and of Urdu at 55 million; however, Rajasthani, often considered a dialect of Hindi, was listed as having 17 million speakers. See Hindustan Year-Book and Who's Who, 1971, ed. S. Sarkar (Calcutta: M. C. Sarkar & Sons, 1971), p. 162. In 1964 estimates were 158 million for Hindi and 53 million for Urdu. See Hindustan Year-Book and Who's Who, 1964, ed. S. Sarkar (Calcutta: M. C. Sarkar & Sons, 1964), p. 357. The increase of Hindi from 158 to 181 million and of Urdu from 53 to 55 million during the same period suggests the unreliability of such figures.

[2]For an excellent discussion of these levels of language, see John J. Gumperz and C. M. Naim, "Formal and Informal Standards in the Hindi Regional Language Area," International Journal of American Linguistics, XXVI, No. 3 (July 1960), 92-117, in the issue "Linguistic Diversity in South Asia: Studies in Regional, Social and Functional Variation," ed. Charles A. Ferguson and John J. Gumperz.

[3]The transliteration scheme used here is approximately that devised by C. M. Naim in his Readings in Urdu: Prose and Poetry (Honolulu: East-West Center Press, 1965), pp. 203-209. -N in this scheme indicates nasalization.

[4]Professor Vasant Khokle has indicated to me that the most productive area in which to seek answers to these questions concerning

neutralization in both Hindi and Urdu would be among the dialects of these standard languages.

[5]Khari boli, it should be pointed out, was also used as a basis for what is referred to today as standard Hindi. This dialect has served as the basis for the writings of the eminent Hindi poet Jayashankar Prasad (1890-1937), a large corpus of whose writings will be presented in English translation in a special issue of Mahfil, A Quarterly of South Asian Literature in late 1973. This special issue will be guest edited by Professor Shreeprakash Kurl of the University of British Columbia.

[6]See Ahmed Ali, "Introduction to Urdu Poetry," Pakistan, II, No. 2 (Autumn 1948), 26.

[7]Among the vaguest and most imprecise uses of these terms, together with that of "Hindustani," were those by Mahatma Gandhi. In an attempt to keep the Indian subcontinent whole after independence from Britain, he subsumed Urdu under the rubric of Hindi with some rather catastrophic results for Urdu, among them the identification of Urdu as a language used exclusively by Muslims. For an explication of Gandhi's stand on the entire language question prior to independence, see D. G. Tendulkar, Mahatma: Life of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, IV (1934-38) (New Delhi: Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, 1952), 22-23, 81-86ff.